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ABSTRACT

A three year study on assessment and grading beginning with preservice reading education teachers and continuing through their student teaching and into their first year of teaching reveals indications that instructor modeling and group work on specific instructional units for developing and using alternative assessment and evaluation procedures in the classroom has positive effects. New teachers appeared to have developed a philosophy that assessment and grading in the literacy classroom are shared responsibilities in which communication of student performance is crucial. (Contains 14 references and 6 tables of data; the survey instrument is attached.) (Author/RS)

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Advocates for Combining Alternative with Traditional Literacy Assessments and Evaluation/Grading Procedures: Practices Benefiting New Teachers

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ABSTRACT

A three year study on assessment and grading beginning with preservice teachers and continuing through their student teaching and into their first year of teaching reveals indications that instructor modeling and group work on specific instructional units for developing and using alternative assessment and evaluation procedures in the classroom has positive effects. New teachers appeared to have developed a philosophy that assessment and grading are shared responsibilities in which communication of student performance is crucial.

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INTRODUCTION

Preservice teacher education students have been characterized as some of the busiest students on any college or university campus. After spending many hours in teacher education courses they simultaneously apply newly learned teaching procedures in field experiences. In literacy assessment and diagnostic courses they learn to administer informal and formal reading measures and analyze spelling, phonic, written expression and reading achievement. They develop personal and child portfolios, teach children self-assessment, formulate written expression checklists to evaluate student writing, write individual education programs, and evaluate themselves. However, class discussions with preservice teachers about applying their newly learned literacy assessment and tutoring knowledge to multiple classroom grading situations, indicate a profound need. Specifically, there is confusion about how to plan, teach, assess, evaluate learning, and report student progress while utilizing authentic teaching methods, assessments and evaluation processes within the framework of a traditional grading system.

RESEARCH AND PURPOSE

An investigation of the related literature reveals researchers have addressed literacy assessment and evaluation processes. Highlighting the differences between assessment and evaluation processes, Anderson and Bachor (1993) simply define assessment as a way of identifying if students are on track with the school's curriculum.

As an extension, evaluation (grading) may be considered as making judgments about assessment information concerning where a student should be and if the student is moving at an acceptable rate towards goals. There is broad agreement between preservice and inservice teachers that the purposes for evaluation (grading) are for determining where the student is performing in the curriculum, in obtaining educational goals, and to enhance student performance (Anderson and Bachor, 1993; Lyon, 1993; and Bratcher, 1994). Further, scholars underscore the existence of instructional needs of preservice and inservice teachers to develop and learn to apply alternative assessment and evaluation procedures that are new to them (Anderson and Bachor, 1993; Lyon, 1993; Ohlausen, Powell and Reitz, 1994; Waltman and Frisbie, 1994; Valencia et al, 1997). To remedy a mismatch among instruction, assessment and grading procedures there is a need to improve communication of evaluation procedures among teachers, students, and parents. Numerous studies underscore the need for input and to inform students and parents of the evaluation procedures utilized (the grade percentage based on academic performance and the portion allocated to completing the process) when assignments are given. The same studies encourage use of parent-student-teacher conferences and handwritten narratives to further explain a student's evaluations (Allison and Friedman, 1995; Anderson and Bachor, 1993; Borko, 1993; Bratcher, 1994; Chen and Ehrenberg, 1993; Cox, 1993; Glazer, 1993; Jones, 1993; Jongsma, 1991; Lyon, 1993; Manning, 1995; Ohlhausen, Powell and Reitz, 1994; and Waltman and Frisbie, 1994).

This longitudinal research study was designed to develop more effective teacher preparation in the areas of assessment and grading including communication of how the student is performing in literacy development. Inclusive of this goal, the following

objective was targeted for investigation over a three-year period and became a benchmark for preservice teacher development:

-to develop a philosophy and practice about assessment and evaluation/grading that begins at the preservice level, is operationalized in student teaching practicums, and transcends into full-time teaching.

To achieve this objective, the study was implemented in three phases. Phase I was initiated in Spring 1996, and included assessment and grading needs discussions with preserve teachers enrolled in literacy courses in a small liberal arts college, a review of the research literature was discussed with the preserve teachers and a survey developed and administered to 25 inservice educators enrolled in graduate education courses at the same college. Survey results and literature conclusions were studied to formulate and start instruction of a unit for preservice literacy courses, Practicum in Reading and an assessment course. Phase II was conducted Fall 1996 and Spring 1997 with the same 17 preservice teachers who had studied the assessment and evaluation unit in their Spring 1996 literacy course. This phase included surveying all 17, with 13 returned, preservice teachers during their student teaching practicums to determine assessment and evaluation procedures utilized. Phase III was conducted during the Fall 1997 and Spring 1998 semesters. This phase included surveying the same 17 preservice teachers during the first year of teaching to determine the assessment and evaluation procedures they were utilizing. The researchers hoped to be able to draw conclusions on practices and philosophies demonstrated by the preservice teachers after studying an assessment and evaluation unit in their teacher education program. All participants were educators in one of four rural or two city school systems surrounding the college. The survey

instrument used was the same for the three phases of the study. Even though the study was limited in scope to include only the preservice and inservice teachers attending a small liberal arts college, the researchers felt it would benefit their future teachers and perhaps offer some helpful information and encouragement to other Teacher Education Programs' literacy instructors.

SURVEY DESIGN AD PROCEDURE

The survey (See Appendix A) consisted of eight sections with sections one and two including teacher demographics; sections three and four addressing report cards and/or reporting systems utilized; sections five and six included classroom assessment and evaluation procedures utilized; section seven requested information about grading systems for students functioning at different achievement levels and the eighth was for open-ended comments. Tallying the first and two succeeding surveys was cumbersome as the teachers wrote much information. The researchers categorized the responses into appropriate agreed upon units as indicated in Tables 1 through 6.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION for Phase I

For Phase I of the three-year project, after reviewing the literature which favored teacher use of alternative procedures for performanced-based assessment and evaluation in continuous and clear communication to students and parents the researchers wanted to develop a unit of study to utilize immediately with preservice teachers in their literacy courses. Thus, the researchers/instructors quickly looked through the just completed inservice teacher Survey 1 forms, as there was not enough time to tally the data and teach a unit within the few remaining weeks of the semester. By looking over the surveys, it was easy to conclude there was much confusion and frustration among educators of all

levels (see Tables 1-6) on the topic of grading, assessment was mostly by tests, and the grading/evaluation was in traditional grades! The researchers developed a unit of study for preservice teacher literacy courses with two components: 1) modeling the information taught and 2) having preservice teachers work in groups to develop an assessment and evaluation system, including communicating/reporting methods for students and parents, to combine traditional grading with alternative measures of performance to match the authentic literacy instructional techniques they were studying in literacy courses.

Component one—instructor modeling

Assessment and evaluation for the 17 Preservice teachers enrolled in the Practicum in Reading course was based on a weekly review of the preservice teacher's tutoring portfolio, a weekly instructor observation of the tutoring and a weekly tutor-instructor conference to discuss the week's tutoring. The evaluation was by a rubric, a checklist with points deducted if not completed. Both tutor and instructor kept copies of the rubric the tutor's was for self-evaluation and the instructor's for the weekly gr de. The rubric included spaces for both the instructor's and tutor's handwritten comments evaluating the tutor's weekly performance. The assessment course, taken simultaneously with the reading practicum course, included preservice teacher and instructor mutually developed rubrics as well as those developed by the instructor for assessing and evaluating daily work. The course test was traditional. The major change for daily class structure was for rubrics to be developed when assignments were given so preservice teachers could participate in self-assessment and be aware of how they were to be evaluated prior to starting an assignment. Of course, this meant they had to discuss and make decisions on what parts of the assignment were more important and needed to

count more points and what information was needed for the product to be of good quality! Time was always a factor so discussion and decisions were limited to only minutes each day. However, the preservice teachers' literacy courses, which already included many alternative or combined alternative with traditional assessment and evaluation procedures began incorporating more student involvement and input into the developing their evaluation instruments for grades before starting work on the assignment. With the modeling portion of the project implemented the researchers were ready for the second component. They noted that the 17 reading practicum tutors were using predominantly alternative assessment and evaluation measures in their tutoring such as checklists and comparing work samples. However, they needed to learn how to put a traditional grade on the assessments and evaluation procedures they were using since traditional grading is what Survey 1 teachers indicated was most used in the local schools.

Component 2—the group project

To begin the unit on assessment and evaluation, preservice teachers heard a lecture on the literature review and the glanced at Survey I findings. Through class discussion, preservice teachers compared this information with their tutoring experience which included, when tutoring a child three times weekly for seven weeks for the Practicum in Reading course, the following required assessment and evaluation procedures: 1) running records, 2) tutee use of self-evaluated checklists for written expression, attitude, behavior and other accomplishments, 3) child-conducted comparisons and analyses of their spelling errors in written expression to locate reoccurring mistakes, and 4) tutor-child weekly conferences culminating with the

tutored child writing comments on the week's academic accomplishments and setting goals to achieve for the next week of tutoring. All of the information was maintained in a portfolio by both tutor and child (each had their portions to complete) and shared through conferences with the child's classroom teacher. Obviously, the Practicum was heavily oriented toward authentic instruction with alternative assessment, evaluation and reporting procedures. Preservice teachers were given the scenario that if they were inservice teachers, now that they had taught the child for six to seven weeks, not only would they be expected to know how the child was performing, they would be expected to record the evaluation on a report card and that usually means (locally) in some form of traditional grades. The project began with an enthusiastic response at the preservice teachers knew, report card grading was something they would have to do very soon!

Counting off into groups of four or five, preservice teachers were given ground rules for rotating roles within their groups at each meeting, discussed and developed rubrics for how they were to be graded that included self, peer and instructor evaluation and finally were assigned a literacy area for their work. These included written expression, phonics and spelling, vocabulary, or reading comprehension, which they had instructed, assessed and evaluated during their tutoring experience. With these assignments the groups worked through each of the following stages:

1. Each selected a state literacy performance requirement for third/fourth graders to accomplish in the assigned area.
2. Each decided on a whole class assignment to instruct for the study and learning of the criteria including developing an alternative assessment and

self-evaluating checklist of items the students needed to do with points awarded for quality. A scale was to accompany the rubric so traditional grades could be given.

3. Using the developed rubric with a work sample from their tutored child's portfolio, each group assessed and then wrote a narrative evaluation to the child's parents on the child's accomplishments and according to the rubric.
4. Each group was to show how to vary the rubrics for different content areas and for challenged as well as for the gifted and talented students.
5. Each group exchanged their unmarked rubric with a child's work sample so that the rubric could be utilized to assess and evaluate the work sample; suggestions were made and incorporated for clarity and effectiveness.
6. Class presentations culminated with sharing each group's rubrics with a copy given to each student.
7. Class members completed their own and peer evaluations. The instructor evaluated the content and incorporated self and peer evaluations into the final project grade according to the rubric scale developed by the class members and the instructor at the beginning of the project.

Throughout the seven-hour class project, the 17 preservice teachers were extremely enthusiastic about their plans. They were aware that a follow-up survey was to be conducted during their student teaching experience (Phase II of the three-year project) and during their first year of teaching employment (Phase III) to ascertain how they had utilized nontraditional assessment and evaluation information including how they communicated with both future parents and students.

Survey Results

Demographics

For Phase I of the project in Spring 1996, twenty-five inservice teachers completed Survey 1. In the 1996-97 academic year after completing the two component instructional unit on combining alternative and traditional assessment with evaluation/grading practices, Phase II was implemented with 13/17 preservice student teachers completing Survey 2. In 1997-98 year, for Phase III, the same 17 now first year teachers were mailed Survey 3 with 10 returning completed surveys. Participants were educators in one of four rural county and tow city school systems in southern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. Teaching assignments for all participating teachers are shown in Table 1 to indicate the subject areas represented by inservice and preservice teachers. Less than half of the Survey 1 and 2 participants reported they were teaching in inclusive settings, while 60% of Survey 3 educators reported they were teaching mainstreamed students who had been identified by the special services departments in their schools systems as having disabilities.

Table 1
Teaching Assignments of Survey Participants

Teaching assignments	Inservice teachers Survey 1	Student teachers Survey 2	First year teachers Survey 3
NK-3	8	10	10
4-8	4	3	
9-12	10		
Sp.Ed.	2		
Adm.	1		
Total	25	13	10
Inclusion	11 (44%)	6 (46%)	6 (60%)

Subjects taught	Inservice teachers	Student teachers	First year teachers
All subjects*	10		
Language Arts/English	8	9	8
Math	1	11	8
Science	3	8	8
Social Studies	5	8	7
Health/PE	1	4	3
Fine Arts	0	2	4

*In Survey 1 all NK-3 teachers and the 2 Special Education teachers indicated they taught all subjects whereas in Survey 2, NK-3 and 4-8 teachers and in Survey 3, NK-3 teachers indicated the exact subjects taught.

Use of report cards

Analysis of compiled data for parts three and four of the Surveys (Table 2) concerning types of report card evaluations teachers utilized indicates a majority of all surveyed educators use some form of a traditional letter grading system that is a school-system-wide policy. However, first year teachers and student teachers indicated that they made more frequent use of narrative/comment and alternative methods (checklists, contracts and effort) than inservice teachers.

Table 2
Use of Report Card

Uses	**Inservice teachers**	**Student teachers**	**First year teachers**
Traditional grades	**22 (88%)**	**10 (77%)**	**8 (80%)**
Written narrative or comments	**2 (8%)**	**9 (69%)**	**8 (80%)**
Alternative uses*	**3 (12%)**	**6 (46%)**	**6 (70%)**
School division grading policy**	**15 (60%)**	**10 (76%)**	**7 (70%)**
Total responding	**25**	**13**	**10**

*Alternative uses identified included checklists, contracts and effort

**Other grading policies included school-wide policies or grade-level policies.

Assessment and evaluation procedures

Assessment and evaluation/grading procedures utilized by all teachers were reported in part five of the surveys. It appears that student teachers and first year teachers use checklists more frequently and first year teachers use work samples comparisons more. However, experienced or inservice teachers reported using projects more frequently.

Table 3
Alternative Assessment Procedures Used

Assessments	Inservice teachers	Student teachers	First year teachers
Checklists	2 (8%)*	10 (77%)	8 (80%)
Projects	16 (64%)	5 (38%)	5 (50%)
Portfolios	10 (40%)	4 (31%)	5 (50%)
Work Samples Comparisons	7 (28%)	3 (23%)	4 (40%)
Contracts	1 (4%)	2 (15%)	2 (20%)
Total	25	13	10

*Even though only 2 teachers in Survey 1 reported using checklists apparently more were using them in very specific assignments as seven reported in the work-sample comparisons procedure that a checklist was utilized for the comparisons of work samples from multiple disciplines.

Table 4
Evaluations of Alternative Assessments Used

(Notations donated by: letter grades – L*, written narrative – N, written comments – W, self evaluation – S, effort and process grades – E, evaluations vary – V, and conferences – C.)

Evaluations of assessments	Inservice teachers	Student teachers	First-year teachers
Checklists	1 L, 1S	5L, 3W, 3N	4L, 4W, 2N
Projects	16LE**	3L, 2W	4L, 1W, 2N
Portfolios	3E, 4W	2L, 1W, 1C	2L, 3W, 2N, 1C
Work Samples Comparisons	4L, 3E	1L	3L, 2W, 1N
Contracts	1V	2V	1L

*A majority of inservice (Survey 1) educators reported giving letter grades partially based on their observation of the students' accomplishments in that subject area such as phonic application, oral reading and reading speed.

**Process and effort were included in the projects' letter grades.

When evaluating students' alternative assessments (Table 4), first-year teachers indicated more frequent use of written narratives and comments to communicate performance results. Inservice teachers were the only survey respondents reporting the inclusion of effort in evaluations. On all three surveys, respondents indicated very little use of self evaluation and teacher-student conferences to communicate performance on assessments.

When asked to identify literacy or language arts areas (Table 5) that teachers used the reported alternative assessment and evaluation/grades the student teachers and first-year teachers indicated some use in all areas with more first-year teachers incorporating the procedures.

Table 5
Alternative Assessments and Evaluation/Grading Procedures Used by Teachers in Literacy Areas

Literacy areas	Student teachers	First-year teachers
Reading comprehension	4	5
Written Expression	4	7
Spelling	4	3
Phonics application in spelling and in reading	4	6
Listening	4	6
Oral reading	4	5
Speaking	3	6
Total educators	13	10

Equality in Systems

The sixth portion of the survey questioned educators to share if they applied their evaluation systems equally to all students. The results are confusing (Table 6) as both "yes" and "no" respondents reported varying their assessment and evaluation procedures for gifted and talented students and for challenged students even though students have the same state criteria to accomplish. Thus, explanations of assessment evaluation systems indicate more variance and less equality among evaluation/grading procedures for students' accomplishments of the school systems' criteria.

Table 6
Equity in Grading for All Levels of Students

Equity levels	Inservice teachers	Student teachers	First-year teachers
Equity	13 yes	10 yes	7 yes
	6 no	3 no	2 no
	6 no response		1 yes & no
Total	25	13	10

Discussions and comments

The last survey section was open-ended. First-year teachers did not express confusion in assessment and evaluation policies. However, ten inservice teachers responding in Survey I expressed some personal struggling over the complexities of the current evaluation system. Three of the 13 student teachers responded; two with explanations of other responses and one with a request for more teacher education program work in evaluation/grading. One indicated a desire for more teacher education work in evaluating effort.

Discussion

Literacy instructors interpret the survey results as indicators of positive growth and change. The implementation of instructor modeling coupled with the instructional unit of study appears to have shaped assessment and grading philosophies of preservice and first-year teachers in several areas. First, new teachers seem to be aware of existing assessment and evaluation procedures both traditional and alternative. Second, new teachers have indicated they have established and are utilizing new knowledge of combining alternative with traditional assessment with evaluation/grading procedures, and how to utilize them in multiple areas of literacy development. Most importantly, the researchers conclude the new teachers developed an assessment and evaluation philosophy to involve more alternative procedures and qualitative feedback to the student and parents. It appears they have grasped the concept that assessment and evaluation are shared responsibilities between those involved. Thus, assessment and evaluation practices changed to include more teacher, student, and parent communication regarding academic performance in areas of literacy development.

Closing remarks

From this very limited study with a few teachers in a local area surrounding a small liberal arts college and using a cumbersome survey, literacy instructors/researchers believe implementing an enhanced instructional unit of study on combining alternative and traditional literacy assessments with evaluation/traditional grades approach has benefited the new teachers performance in the classroom. The researchers also believe that instructor modeling for preservice teachers when enrolled in literacy courses helped create a working assessment and evaluation knowledge that preservice teachers were able to take into their classroom teaching as indicated by their responses of using more written comments, narratives, and checklists in the evaluations. This study is indicative of what literacy instructors can accomplish through modeling and using carefully constructed instructional units of study to enhance future teachers development of an assessing and evaluating/grading philosophy. Most of all, new teachers indicated awareness and understanding of communicating to the child and parent how the child is functioning in ways other than just by a grade. Hopefully, these first-year teachers will continue to develop this philosophy.

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Lawrence Album.

APPENDIX

Assessment and Grading Survey

I. Please circle the grade and subjects you currently teach:

Grades: K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Subjects: Language Arts, Math, Science, Fine Arts, History/Social Studies and Health/Physical Education

II. Do you teach n inclusion class? (circle one) yes or no

III. Please indicate all types of report card assessments that you utilize by checkingthe appropriate blanks.

--Letter grading (A-F; E,S,U; other)

--Subjective grading reports

--narrative comments

--handwritten comments

--computer generated comments

--Effort exhibited

--to learn skills

--to complete processes assigned

--Checklists

--denoting skills learned

--denoting accuracy

--other (Please describe)

IV. Please indicate with a check if your report card grading system is:

--a school-system report card policy

--a school-wide report card policy

--a grade level report card policy

--your personal report card policy

--other (Please describe)

V. Please indicate with checks the kinds of assessment procedures that you use and how the results are evaluated.

Assessment Procedures	Evaluation		
	Letter Grades	Comments	Narrative
A. Portfolios			
B. Checklists			
C. Work Sample Comparisons			
D. Projects			
E. Contracts			

VI. Following each of the assessment procedures listed in Section V, briefly list the areas mentioned below, that you assess and evaluate accordingly.

Written Expression Spelling Speaking Listening Oral Reading Acc8uracy

Reading Comprehension Phonic Application in Reading and Spelling

VII. Please indicate by circling yes or no whether your assessment and evaluation practices are applied equally to all students?

YES NO

--Please discribe how your assessment and evaluation procedures may vary for the exceptional student who is considered gifted.

--Please describe how your assessment and evaluation procedures may vary for the exceptional student who has disabilities.

VIII. Please write any comments that you wish to make.